

[The Cat that Couldn't Be Killed]

Oregon

Howard McKinley Corning

THE CAT THAT COULDN'T BE KILLED

I've killed lots of wild game in my day. Cougars, bears, timber wolves, and wildcats—I've trapped or shot 'em all. But the toughest job I ever had was trying to do away with a blame, ornery house cat.

We had raised him from a kitten, see; and for years he was agreeable enough. But when he began to get old he began to get mean. He batted around a lot in the woods, and I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't mix with a wild cat now and then. Independent? Say, you had to get out of his way, or he'd spit at you like a bull o' the woods in a logging camp. He was getting too disrespectful for a man's mortal ego. Besides that, he was killing things around the place; chickens, and finally one of the geese. The goose like as not made the mistake of trying to out-hiss the damn rascal, and the cat just naturally throttled him.

Well, that wasn't all. Every time he made a killing foray in the forest he'd drag his kill back to the homeplace, and just drop the dead weasel, or packrat, or rabbit right out in the open yard. Didn't seem to want to eat them. If I didn't drag the carcasses off somewhere they'd lay there until you couldn't go outdoors without holding your nose. When he came dragging a skunk in one morning, that was the last. "I'll drown that skunk-toting feline," I swore. "You'll get scent on yuh," the kid hollered from the woodpile, heaving a stick of firewood at the scowling creature. Its yellow-gray markings, as I looked at it then, made it resemble a civit cat more'n ever.

I waited almost a week. Meanwhile the place began to smell like an unburied cemetery, what with the skunk and all the other dead things lying around. Then I got my chance.

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It had been raining a lot and the cat sort of hung around the place. I cornered it one day in the crib, where it was minding its own business for once, hunting for rats. I called the kid and somehow we got it into a gunny-sack. "We'll drown him, I said, putting a rock in the sack. We'll drag him down to the creek and drop him in."

And that's what we done, with the dam cat spitting and clawing like a hail storm in a feather-bed. We had to sort of keep out of the way of the sack, while we dragged it down through the brush to the stream, not to get all hacked up by the claws jabbing through. Once we got there we gave a big heave and shot the tied-up critter out into the deepest part of the creek.

"So much for you, you son of the wilderness," we howled after him, and turned and started back just as soon as we saw him sink.

Well, we was hallosing before we was out of the woods, as the fellow says, because we hadn't got fifty feet up the trail when, dang me, if that cat didn't come tearing by through the brush a-spitting and a-throwing water like a March rainstorm. When we got back up to the house there he was, strutting around in high-heeled boots, proud and haughty.

I was so mad then I swore I'd shoot his short off, and stamped into the house for my gun. I kept it loaded, as we always did in them days.

Well, it looked like a set-up again, for when I came out that cat was up sitting on the ridge of the crib, crey-eyed and staring, sort of daring me to pop at him. I chuckled — I knew how fast I was with the gun. And bingo! — I just pulled up and let 'er go. I saw two or three shingles fly and thought I'd got the cat sure. But the next instant I saw the creature high-

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tailing it down the barn lot for the woods. I was howling mad then. It had begun to look like I was rowing up Salt Creek, trying to kill the animal.

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“The next time we get a chance at that beast we'll take it out in the forest and chop its head off, I told the kid. “We'll hog-tie it and just naturally cut its wits apart from its legs. It won't do much walking and killing without its wits.”

Ma could do anything with that cat, except make it drink milk - it was too tough for that. So we asked her to cook up a mess of the sort of grub that feline just naturally purred over. “Just feed him in the kitchen,” I said”; and while he's choking it down we'll drop a noose over his fool head. It won't take us long after that. It's a low-down trick, catching him that way, but the bloody son of Satan ain't got no sentiment about him anyway. He's a menace even to wild life.”

Well, ma done as we asked her to, and in no time a-tall we had the cat tied up like a poke and dangling on a pole between us. Maybe that creature wasn't howling and spitting and glaring! I guess he knew he had been tricked and was just as good as done for.

“We're going to have to lift your hair, kitty”, I said, “Only I guess we'll do it at the neck.” He knew what I was saying all right.

We got him down to the woods and onto a low stump. We stretched him out so there'd be a lot of neck for the axe to strike and not miss. We tried him that way — spread-eagle, on one side. He just lay there and glared at us, with a mean kind of twinkle in his amber-green eyes. He wasn't spitting any more. Somehow we never got a scratch. “Here goes your nine lives,” I says, lifting the axe.

One clean stroke was all I needed. I brought that down with all the force I had, and I meant it. Somehow I never thought I might miss and cut the rope instead, and free the crey-

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eyed bat. But there the creature lay in two pieces, head and body. "That finishes you," I exclaimed. The kid howled with delight. "You got him this time, pop," he hollered.

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We took the ropes off and kicked the head and carcass into the leaves, and strolled back home through the woods. The kid was still elated but I felt sort of let down; it was a nasty job, the kind I never liked, not even if I was mad. "We'd better tame a wild cat next time," I told the kid; "not keep no house cats to go wild on us." The kid agreed.

We come up through the barn lot, past the sheds, saying we'd have to gather up the dead animals that was lying round and rotting in the yard, and was almost to the house, when we looked up, both of us at once. You can't imagine how surprised we was at what we saw!

There on the back doorstep sat the cat we thought we had killed, holding his head in his mouth!